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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process of identity formation of a nonnative English speaking (NNES) graduate student pursuing a master of arts in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The factors that influence the formation of a professional identity are examined for nonnative English speaking TESOL pre-service professionals. An extensive literature review of the topic is included. The paper is a case study of one TESOL NNES graduate student and her struggle to define a professional identity as both a learner and a teacher. General social identity theory is asserted to be useful in understanding this issue. (Contains 39 references.) (KFT)

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Social Identities and the NNES MA TESOL Student

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1. INTRODUCTION

In every aspect of our lives, personal or professional, there is a need to understand ourselves and our place in the world. It is a search for and understanding of an identity, what Norton (1997) describes as a way "to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p 410).

For teachers, this means forging a professional identity recognized by self and others as *teacher*. Because a teaching identity is not a static, fixed reality, but shifts with "new challenges, new work environments, new social contexts, new questions, and new ideas" (McLean, 1999, p. 70), and is "never completed" (Britzman, 1994, p. 70), it becomes one aspect of professional development that continues throughout the teaching career. Connelly and Clandinin (1999), in their investigations of a teacher knowledge base, found that teachers, regardless of experience, were inclined to ask questions of identity – the teachers were more concerned about *who* they are than of *what* they know (3).

The process of building an identity begins, in part, with our first connection to teaching –as students. As prospective language teachers move into pre-service education, they must juggle their perceptions as students with other aspects of their own personal identities to forge an additional understanding of themselves as teachers. Our many other selves influence and inform our understanding of what it is to teach language and what language teachers are. What is the process for pre-service English language teachers? What factors are influential in the formation of a professional identity, and how does this differ for different populations of pre-service teachers? Specifically, and in keeping with

a personal interest in issues affecting nonnative English speaking (NNES) MA TESOL students, how much do we presently understand about the identity formation for these students and any influences this may have for their professional identities as they go on to teach following their graduate programs?

2. *IDENTITY AND THE NNEST*

Studies focusing on issues facing nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) have begun to appear with more regularity in the professional literature and some have looked specifically at the issue of identity for NNESTs (Amin, 1997; 1999; Braine, 1999; Mawhinney and Xu, 1997; Medgyes, 1999; Tang, 1997). Braine (1999) contends that a confusion over identity for NNESTs may lead to lowered self-confidence and to "an acute sense of one's marginalized, unstable status in the ELT profession" (p. xviii). Given this risk, the recent push to recognize and empower NNESTs in the profession (the formation of the NNEST caucus in TESOL is an example), and with the increasing numbers of NNES students pursuing graduate degrees in MA TESOL programs in the United States, it is increasingly important that we understand the experiences of NNES students as they begin the process of establishing professional identities as ELT professionals.

Braine (1999) briefly outlines the difficulties encountered while attempting to name the TESOL NNEST professional caucus, and the search to find a name that does not focus on the "otherness" of the nonnative speaker. He sees this as evidence of an "identity crisis" for NNES ELT professionals in general (xvii).

Medgyes claims that for NNESTs to "be effective, self-confident, and satisfied professionals, first, we have to be near-native speakers of English" (1999, p.179) and the bulk of recent research has focused on language proficiency and it's role in NNESTs' confidence (Cullen, 1994; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Murdoch, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Saylor, 2000).

Amin (1997, 1999) focuses on the impact of NNES race and gender in the formation of professional identities, arguing that "students' construction of their minority teachers as nonnative speakers and therefore less able teachers than White teachers has an impact on their identity formation." (581). The issue of race also surfaced in a study of foreign trained immigrant teachers enrolled in a recredentialing program in Canada (Mawhinney and Xu 1997). The researchers found that the teachers' accented English resulted in the constant questioning of their validity as teachers, affecting their self-esteem and impacting their professional development and the reconstruction of teaching identities.

Tang (1997), drawing from social identity theory, researched perceptions of proficiency and competency of native English speaking (NES) and NNES teachers of English among 47 NNESTs in Hong Kong. The results were that NESTs were respected as the models of the language, and revealed that many of the NNESTs felt less fluent in their language skills and less adequate as teachers, particularly in curricula that emphasize communication.

Little has been written about the development of a professional identity for NNESTs and the factors that influence the shaping of that identity. Much discussion has centered around the perceived dichotomies between NEST and NNEST (for examples,

see Liu, D., 1999; Medgyes, 1994; Rampton, 1996); how important is that group membership in the formation of teacher identity for new NNES teachers? Because identity is relational, about how people "see themselves in representation, and about how they construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others" (Hetherington, 1998) an analysis utilizing the theory of social identity, and how it relates to NNESTs, may prove helpful in understanding how "identity is articulated through the relationship between belonging, recognition or identification and difference" (p. 15).

In addition, there has been a recent call for longitudinal studies that focus, in part, on the use of social identity theory to chart different phases in identity construction for SLA research (Hansen and Liu, 1997). While the focus here is on the language learner, such research might also be illuminative if applied to an understanding of identity construction for NNES pre-service teachers. This study attempts to heed that call and add to current knowledge of the experience and construction of identity through an understanding of social identity theory and its application through a close examination of one NNES teacher as she moves through her MA TESOL program.

Such a study has meaning for teachers as well as teacher educators. Social identity theory has been used in SLA studies focusing on the language learner (Goldstein, 1995; Pierce, 1993; 1995), but little attention has been paid to the social identity of NNES pre-service teachers. Using social identity theory will shed light on aspects of the complex nature of teacher identity development not currently available in the literature and will add insights specific to that identity in NNES pre-service teachers. This will add to our understanding of the experience of this particular population of new teachers in the

expanding MA TESOL programs. For teachers, it may help to highlight factors that influence self-understanding. To teacher educators, an understanding of the process of identity development, especially for this growing population of MA TESOL students, will assist those who seek to "create models of teacher education that are sensitive to and more supportive of the person in the process" (McLean, 1999, p.70).

3. Theoretical framework

For this paper, I draw from the social identity theory of Hogg and Abrams (1988) and Terry and Hogg (2000) based on the work of Tajfel (1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This theory espouses the concept of a social identity based on the social categories created by society that are relational in power and status. "'Social categories' refers to the division of people" like nationality, race, class, occupation, etc., "while 'power and status relations' refers to the fact that some categories in society have greater power, prestige, status, and so on, than others" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p.14). According to Hogg and Abrams, "people derive their identity (their sense of self, their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong" (p. 19). This sense of belonging to different groups is "inextricably linked in the sense that one's conception or definition of who one is (one's identity) is largely composed of self-descriptions in terms of the defining characteristics of social groups to which one belongs" (p.7).

Related to this, and from which I also draw, is the theory of self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell, 1987) which emphasizes the self-categorization of the self into social groupings and how that is reflected in ones self-concept, or identity. Both theories are concerned with the relationship between group

memberships and social identities, but there are key differences relevant to this study. First, social identity theory argues that the motive for positive self-esteem comes through a comparison of ingroup (the group to which you belong) and outgroup (that group which stands in relation to a particular ingroup) memberships. Self-categorization is important, but is not the driving force. Self-categorization theory focuses less on motivation and more on explanations for how self-categorizations occur. Important features include the fact that self-categorization is "temporally and contextually determined, and consequently is in continual flux" and that identification with a negatively valued group, for even a short while, will have a "negative impact on one's level of self-esteem" (Sherman, Hamilton, and Lewis, 1999, pp. 88-89).

Social identity theory recognizes the membership of individuals into many groups, allowing a potential "repertoire of many different identities to draw upon" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 19). At any time our membership in one group or another may have more significance, may be more *salient*, depending largely on our surroundings and the context in which we find ourselves. Likewise, self-categorization theory recognizes multiple group memberships, arguing that self-definition is a dynamic process and "is largely context dependent" (Sherman, Hamilton and Lewis, 1999, p. 87). For example, I am white, a woman, a mother, a citizen of the United States, an ESL teacher, a NES, among many other things. Which of these social identities is most salient at any given time is largely dependent on where I am, who I am with, and what I am doing.

4. Social Identity, Self-categorization, and the NNEST

The social identity approach, with its emphasis on group membership, has particular relevance for understanding the issues confronting NNES MA TESOL students enrolled in US graduate programs. I believe that MA TESOL students, in the process of establishing a self-identification as *ESL teacher*, also find themselves in the social group of *nonnative English speaking teacher*, and that these self-identifications exist alongside one another in each individual's concept of self. Which of these predominate will depend on the context. Different situations and circumstances "render different self-identifications 'salient' self-images. The self is thus both enduring and stable, and also responsive to situational or exogenous factors" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 25).

Despite recent questions about the legitimacy of the idealization of the native speaker as the best teacher of English (Phillipson, 1992) or the motives and validity of maintaining the distinction between native English speakers and nonnative English speakers (Amin, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Liu, D,. 1999) the two categories do exist in English language teaching today. There is little question that the social category of *NES* still enjoys a power and status that the category *NNES* does not. This difference in power and status is evident in hiring preferences for NESs (Amin, 1999; Braine, 1999; Brown, 1998; Liu, J., 1999; Medgyes, 1992) and the underrepresentation of NNES professionals in scholarly journals (Flowerdew, 1999).

Many NNES students in US-based MA TESOL programs are consistently reminded of their NNES group membership – in their own comparison with peers, the confidence about academic work and interactions with faculty and students (Milambling, 2000; Saylor, 2000), at conferences (Thomas, 1999), or in job advertisements that

advertise explicitly for native speakers (Norton, 1997). I would argue that, reinforced by adherence to the NES/NNES dichotomy, social identification as a NNES, in the ELT profession as a whole and in MA TESOL programs in particular, may become more salient and significant than membership in other groups, including that of ESL teacher.

Utilizing the social identity theory outlined above, and focusing on the experience of a single NNES graduate student enrolled in an MA TESOL program in the United States, this paper will attempt to answer the following:

- How useful is social identity theory in understanding NNES teacher identity?
- What role does NNES group membership and social identity play in the development of a teacher identity?
- How significant is the social identification as a nonnative speaker of English in the formation of an ELT professional identity for MA TESOL students?

4. MARC'S EXPERIENCE

4.1 Data and Methods

This paper attempts to supplement our understanding of the dynamics of developing a professional identity as a nonnative English speaking graduate student in a US MA TESOL program. To do this, I shall draw in part on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) and use a "storied" approach to share the identity formation and framing experiences of one NNES graduate student as she moves through graduate school. Stories of teacher experiences are "both personal–reflecting a person's life history—and social—reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live" (p.2), thus, I will share the words and stories that reflect the personal and the milieu for Marc, a Mexican woman in her late twenties, that reveal her development and multiple identities

as she forges a professional identity as an ESL teacher. It is through teachers' stories that we "connect to and build connections within the person which is becoming a teacher" (McLean, 1999: 78-9), and it is my belief that sharing these will provide data from which teachers can reflect and grow professionally, and become a rich resource of experience and insights that teacher educators can learn from and share with other pre-service teachers. Marc's experiences and perceptions are nicely illustrative of the dynamic and fluid nature of identity, the situated nature of understanding who one is, and the multiple influences on identity formation for one NNES pre-service teacher in the United States.

I play a role in this as well, both as researcher and as a peer. I met Marc in my first graduate class in the MA TESOL program, and then connected again when she entered the program. Over the course of the two year period from which this study is derived, we have become friends as well as colleagues, and my interest in teacher education and the experiences of NNESs is largely an outgrowth of that relationship. I have established a level of trust with Marc that has allowed her to share her perceptions and reflections honestly. And although Marc has had the opportunity to read and comment on my findings, I do not claim that Marc's stories, as told here, are purely her own. I share in the construction of those stories in that I am the one who structured the research, asked the questions, and ultimately wrote of her experiences.

Data were collected over a one and a half-year period through 2 interviews, informal discussions, and an on-going collaborative reflective journal. The interviews, of about one hour's duration, were semi-structured to allow Marc ample opportunity to ask questions of her own and to guide the direction of the interviews. At the start of this study, Marc was in her second year in the MA program and still taking classes. Now

finished with her coursework and working independently to complete her thesis, she is employed full-time at an area high school teaching ESL and developing a family literacy program. Although this study focuses on her graduate school experiences, data has been collected and utilized from this period following school; her reflections with hindsight add a valuable dimension to her perceptions.

In addition, her comments and reactions to my findings have also been insightful additions to the final paper. From this data, drawn from a larger, on-going longitudinal study which focuses on the professional preparation and development of NNES MA TESOL students, have emerged themes of Marc's development and social identities as she attempts to formulate a professional identity.

I have organized this study of Marc's emerging identity utilizing those themes that emerged from the data – her attempt to balance her concurrent identities as English language teacher and English language student, her constantly reinforced social identity as a NNES and the "otherness" of that identity, and finally, her successful formulation of a positive ingroup identity. The data and analysis will be followed by a conclusion of the findings and implications that can be drawn from this study.

4.2 Marc's story-background

Born and raised in Mexico City, Marc began taking English classes as a child, although she "really didn't like English" until college. At the university she took a degree in mass communication while continuing her English studies off campus. In addition, she took a course for English language teaching and taught EFL for almost one year following her university study, before relocating to the United States for personal

reasons. Once in the US, she worked for two years as a volunteer ESL tutor, working with Latino and Hmong immigrants, while taking advanced ESL classes at the university Intensive English Program. Now with a renewed interest for English, inspired in part by living in the United States and working with immigrants, having discovered an interest in teaching while in Mexico, and ready to continue studies in graduate school, she spoke to her ESL teachers in the IEP who "told me about the degree, the MA program. And I thought well, I will try it."

4.3 In the MA TESOL Program

4.31 The context

The MA TESOL program in which Marc enrolled is a two-year program in a large Midwestern US university situated in a large urban area. As an ESL student at the university IEP, Marc believed that the MA program "was entirely and exclusively for NES[s]" and only applied after she spoke to her ESL teachers and after she met another NNES, a Chinese graduate student in the linguistics department. Marc entered the program with a group of ten new students, of which three were NNES international students. Of the six students who entered the program the year before and who were still taking courses and teaching in the university IEP, none were NNESs. The three MA TESOL faculty was composed of native speakers, the administrative staff and all of the teachers at the university IEP were native speakers. Entering the MA program, she found herself a member of a numerically small minority in the department and this categorization as a NNEST had a remarkable and telling influence on her understanding of herself as an ELT professional.

In addition, Marc was in a rather unique position as she moved from being student to teacher. Not only was she a NNES graduate student surrounded by NESs, she also had taken ESL classes in the very IEP in which she found herself doing her TESL practicum. She began working with teachers as colleagues that just the year before were her language teachers. From this context, two themes emerged in her stories of herself during this time – her need to juggle the changing/blurred identities of teacher and student and a heightened awareness of her social identification as a NNES.

4.32 ESL teacher/ESL student

Like many new teachers, Marc sought to reconcile her conflicting identities as student *and* teacher (see Britzman, 1991 for an account of this struggle for student teachers). The situation for Marc was further complicated by the fact that she was both a student of teaching and a student of the language. This presented challenges not only for Marc, but for those around her, as is reflected in one story of her practicum experience. Marc was keenly aware of her overlapping and multiple identities as a TESL graduate student/ESL teacher/English language learner and her attempts to balance these often seemed to make others uncomfortable.

Her struggle to establish a teaching identity focused in part on these tensions, manifested in particular through the ESL teaching practicum – identifying herself as an ESL teacher and seeking feedback from the mentor teacher on classroom management, lessons, etc., but also on her self-categorization as an ESL student, seeking help on her pronunciation or grammar.

> I asked my mentor teacher to give me feedback after class about my teaching, about planning methods, but also about my grammar mistakes, and she didn't,

> because she felt, I don't know, weird, like I'm embarrassing her or, and it's not, I really need to know what I'm saying and how I'm saying this.

Although the mentor teacher provided teaching feedback, Marc was frustrated that her mentor teacher was hesitant to comment on her language skills. Despite Marc's request for language feedback, her mentor teacher provided grammar feedback only once in a ten week term, and even then it seemed to Marc that her mentor "was feeling uncomfortable." The ease with which Marc seemed to shift between identities as both language teacher and language student may have been more troublesome for her mentor teacher. She seemed willing to accept Marc as a new and emerging *ESL teacher* (different as a NNEST, but still a member of the group), but appeared to struggle with Marc's self-identification as an *ESL student*. In keeping with the social identifications of ingroup and outgroup membership, it is possible that the mentor teacher was prepared to accept Marc's ingroup status as an ESL teacher (which stands in relation to the outgroup ESL student), but felt it necessary to distinguish between Marc and the ESL students in the class. In so doing, she affirmed Marc's social identity as an ESL teacher. By hesitating to accept Marc's appeal for language help, however, she denied Marc's social identification as an ESL student, in some ways making Marc more aware of the "negative" associations of this categorization. Marc confirmed that this was the case in a member check conducted after the paper had been written. The risk of "negative" associations, as outlined in self-categorization theory, is that identification with a negatively valued group can have a "negative impact" on self-esteem (Sherman, et.al., 1999, p.89). It is not obvious here that this was the case for Marc, although one can certainly argue that the mentor teacher's attitudes probably didn't help.

In a discussion of the language proficiency required to be an effective language teacher, Marc acknowledged that she was always a learner herself and reveals an underlying tension caused by that awareness:

> when you get more advanced [teach more advanced courses] you have to be ready for questions from students and you have to be always like ahead of your students.

The need to be "ahead of your students" reveals a tension and wariness that she felt she might be unable to answer student questions. I am certain that many new teachers deal with the same nervousness and insecurities, but I would argue that NNESs may have additional worries, born out of their awareness of shared ingroup status as ESL students (but with a need to be distinctive within that group, i.e. proficient enough to be teachers), and group membership as NNESs (as opposed to the numerically more significant and influential group of NESs). This latter, in my view, is of particular importance, resulting in a "maximaz[tion] of intergroup differences" (Terry, Hogg and White, 2000, p. 72) – primarily language skills – encouraging an insecurity in their faith in themselves as expert speakers.

Interestingly, too, despite her shared membership in the group of ESL teachers, Marc felt the same tension directed at her teacher colleagues. She said this about consulting her colleagues concerning grammar or language questions:

> Maybe I won't feel comfortable asking that question to a colleague…and might find myself "isolated". I would need a high level of trust on my colleagues if I have to ask something about language usage. After all, I'm an ESL teacher, I should know, shouldn't I?

Given her experiences with her mentor teacher and her awareness of herself as a NNES (and an ESL student) with faculty, peers, and administrators, it should not be surprising that Marc felt some hesitation about facing her language insecurities, with both her ESL students as well as with her ESL colleagues.

4.33 Otherness and the NNEST

More salient than her dual identities as teacher and student for Marc in this graduate school context was her awareness of her outgroup status as a NNES. In the interviews and discussions, the acknowledgement of her social identity as a NNES was ever-present. Surrounded by NES students, and NES faculty and NES IEP teachers, Marc felt a pressure to perform based on her status as a NNES. She had this to say in her first interview with me, a NES:

> And to be able to write a paper, I'm not talking about perfect paper, but an acceptable paper, I guess that's quite important in terms of, like if I'm going to send a cover letter for a job and that person doesn't know anything about me or what I have been doing, that person's going to like make a decision based on the paper, so that, and that happens to everybody, I mean when you ask for a job, you're taking a risk, this person's going to make a decision without even seeing me. So when you, I mean if we start like right now, like now, you can like take for granted that you will use the nativeness part and I have to like think, okay, is this correct, or is this I'm just translating or, so I have to do the double.

She felt this in her academic work and interactions in the department:

> if I have to send an email to a faculty member, if I have to write a paper, I have to check that twice or three times because I, in this program I have to show some kind of proficiency, and then I need to demonstrate that I am good enough to be teaching someone else language, someone else culture, someone else concepts of whatever, so I have to and I have to be ready for questions, like from students, from faculty, from our classmates their points of view. I just, it's tricky.

The saliency of her self-identification as a NNES was reflected in her practicum experiences. In her teaching practicum Marc worked with a NES mentor teacher in the university IEP. Although she called it a "good experience" it also seemed fraught with difficulties, ranging from the previous discussion of her mentor teacher's unwillingness to acknowledge and help with her language skills, to different teaching styles to, to Marc's wariness at becoming a symbol of her nationality . She had this to say about her practicum experience:

> I'm like more, like slower teacher, I wait a lot for students, I like to wait, and she was so fast! And sometimes I felt, I mean she was like getting into my class, when I was teaching, like answering some questions, or making some clarifications and that, as a student, as any student native or nonnative, it gives, it takes out a little confidence, like what am I doing here if she is going to teach?...As a nonnative speaker I guess that upsets you double, because it's hard to get trust from students like okay she's a nonnative speaker, she's teaching me English and she doesn't know what she's teaching because the real teacher is intervening.

It is likely that the mentor teacher's perceptions and understandings differ on her reasons for interjecting while Marc taught. What is significant in the forging of a professional identity, however, is Marc's perceptions of what was happening, and this excerpt provides some insight. Beyond teaching styles and beyond ownership of the class as mentor/mentee, lurks the issue of self-confidence as seen through the lens of one aspect of her social identity – her membership in the group *Non-Native English Speaker*. According to Hogg and Abrams (1988), this psychological state "is phenomenologically real and [has] important self-evaluative consequences" (p.7). She worried again about student perceptions. And for Marc, struggling to move from student to teacher, and struggling with a mentor teacher who was "getting into my class," meant the risk of being seen as illegitimate by her students, *especially because she is a NNES.*

Others' perceptions of her social identities influenced her sense of herself. Marc's identity was defined largely, but not exclusively, by her status as a NNES. When asked how she felt about identity, Marc had this to say:

> I always compare my identity in Mexico and how it changed when I came here to the US. In Mexico I was a woman, young adult, from middle class with a profession. From a Catholic family, single.
> When I came here, after a few months I start to realize all the LABELS that people put on me and sometimes without even asking me or giving me the chance to show who I am. Here I was/am an ESL learner, Latina, Mexican, woman, single, Catholic, student of color, NNEST, minority, Hispanic, bilingual, and I don't know what else…people just label me.

In social comparisons of one social category to another, there is "a tendency to maximize intergroup distinctiveness – to differentiate between the groups as much as possible on as many dimensions as possible" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 23). In Marc's account of Americans' perceptions of her in the US, the majority of these descriptors focused on her nonnativeness, in the "otherness" in her language, race and culture. This was evident in another story from practicum:

> During my practicum at [] I taught Oral Skills. One topic was people of the US (or something like that). Students received a handout about the different groups of people living in the US: Native Americans, Latino-Mexican-American, African-American, and so on. Some information on the Latino immigrants was, in my opinion, too general and maybe inaccurate. I decided not to go into a discussion with my mentor on this. why? I don't know. Maybe, because I didn't want to be perceived as the "Cultural Representative", second because I was supposed to be focused on the language aspect of the class, and third, because it was more my mentor's class than mine.

Despite her concern about the accuracy or fairness of the material being represented, Marc was hesitant to discuss this with her mentor teacher. The issue of her nonnativeness, and others awareness of it, made her hesitant to voice an opinion that might feed the perception of her as a "Cultural Representative." Struggling to gain

admittance to the group as ESL teacher, she was leery of reinforcing this label, or social categorization, to the many already in place that stressed her distinctive outgroup identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 21).

In the end, Marc taught the material and in doing so assumed her teacher *role*, "or what one is supposed to do," but denied her teacher *identity*, "or what one believes and thinks" (Britzman, 1994, p.59). She rationalized her decision to herself in part by shifting the responsibility, thereby allowing her to remain true to her own beliefs while teaching something she does not believe – it "was more my mentor's class than mine".

4.34 Positive ingroup identity

Finally, and in keeping with the motivations outlined in social identity theory, Marc desire for positive self-esteem compelled her to establish an "ingroup" identity that was both positive and supporting. She attended the TESOL conference her first year of graduate school where she encountered other NNESTs involved in the NNEST caucus:

> That's really nice to meet these people, I felt that I was the only one in the world. So it was nice to be there, like the purpose to get recognized, get equal employment opportunities, salary…I mean there have been nonnative teachers for years…I'm reading articles from five years ago and they don't even mention them, it's like native speakers, native speakers…Personally, I like the idea of being a part of that group. I'd like to be more involved.

For Marc, involvement in TESOL and her membership in the NNEST caucus (her ingroup of NNESTs) allowed her to focus on the positive distinctions between this group and others, to "accomplish a relatively positive self-evaluation that endows the individual with a sense of well-being, enhanced self-worth and self-esteem" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 23). Joining the NNEST caucus gave her comfort in the fact that she was not

"the only one." To illustrate Marc's belief that identification as a NNEST presented difficulties that NESs do not face, she felt that, given the opportunity to change anything about her graduate program, she would put more emphasis in establishing equity between native and nonnative teachers:

> I would, I don't know how, but to let people know that native speaker and nonnative speaker are equal able to teach a class, so that both, like, to let faculty know, to let master students know, and to let know [] teachers and [] students because that's something hard.

Marc's experience in the MA TESOL program, in terms of her process of becoming an ELT professional, was significant for the tensions she encountered in her blurring identities as student/teacher, and her sensitive awareness to her status as a NNEST. In this context, Marc sought to balance her social identifications as both ESL teacher/ESL student. But it was her categorization as a NNEST that became the most salient of her many group memberships and social identities, present in her stories of experience with peers, faculty, colleagues and students. To enhance her positive self-esteem, Marc became involved with TESOL and the NNEST caucus, finding affirmation and encouragement from other members of the group of NNESTs.

5. *Conclusion*

Like many new teachers, Marc had to balance her identifications of herself as both teacher and student. Her self-categorization as an ESL student, however, was not one that was easy for some of her peers and colleagues to accept, as evidenced in some of her graduate school experiences. In the graduate school context where the subject and the teaching was valued and she was surrounded by, and accepted into, the ingroup of

ESL teachers, Marc's self-identification and group membership as an NNEST became most salient and an awareness of this aspect of her social identity was heightened. She was aware of her 'otherness' and was sensitive to others' perceptions of her as culturally and linguistically different. To counter the tendency this might have for negative self-evaluation, she sought out others in this 'outgroup' and joined the TESOL NNEST caucus, seeking to emphasize the positive distinctions of being a NNEST.

I believe that this study demonstrates the usefulness of social identity theory in understanding NNES teacher identity, and it clearly indicates the role that NNES group membership plays in the understanding of self, at least in the case of this NNES MA TESOL student. Marc's understanding of herself and her responsibilities and interactions in graduate school were overwhelmingly framed by her understanding of herself as a NNES. This group membership was reinforced by her presence in a program surrounded by NESs, her interactions with peers and faculty, and the constant reinforcement by these and the field as a whole of her status as a NNEST.

What role this social identity plays in the development of her professional identity is somewhat difficult to say. It clearly does play a role at this point, for it was present in every discussion of herself – in her classroom experiences, expectations from faculty, teaching in the IEP classroom. To the third research question, then – of what significance is the social identification as a nonnative speaker of English in the formation of an ELT professional identity for NNES students enrolled in a US MA TESOL program – I believe this study can shed some light. Yes, it is significant to students' understanding of themselves if for no other reason than that their awareness of their status in this outgroup is continually emphasized. While those in the majority ingroup of NESTs can work to

establish a professional identity as ESL teachers without worry about "the nativeness part," NNESTs must also find ways to forge a positive group identity as a NNEST in order to avoid the risk of what Braine (1999) calls an "identity crisis" (p. xvii).

How large a role this social identification will play for others, however, may vary greatly from student to student and from situation to situation. In Marc's environment it dominated, for others, or for Marc in another context, it may recede and become less salient. There is no question, however, that this social identification played a major role in her understanding of herself, as well as in the ways others saw her, in her experience in graduate school.

This look at the stories of a single NNES MA TESOL student and her experiences in graduate school is limited but valuable. It is valuable to see that Marc's search for positive group membership as an NNEST is one that she must conduct on her own – surrounded by NES faculty, peers and teachers, there is no existing local support group to which she can turn. Marc is a strong, proud person, who searches for ways to enhance her own self-esteem, but what of other students less forthright or aware of something like the NNEST caucus?

Of what significance is the struggle that Marc encountered in her search to establish a positive group identity as a NNES? What implications does this have for teachers and teacher educators? As an ESL student at the university IEP, Marc believed that the MA program "was entirely and exclusively for NES[s]" and only applied after she met a Chinese graduate student in the linguistics department. The presence of another NNES reassured her. According to Marc, "When I saw her I thought: if she can do it, I can do it." This emphasizes the importance of role models and diversity in

programs for incoming students. In addition, I would argue that increasing the value of NNEST contributions to the ELT profession, through the presence of NNES teachers and researchers in the professional literature reviewed in classes to open discussion of the NES/NNES dichotomy and the strengths and weaknesses of both NESTs and NNESTs as classroom teachers, will play a significant role in valuing the identities of NNESTs and contributing to positive self-esteem to enhance identity development as an ELT professional. As Marc's experience from the teaching practicum shows, facilitating dialogue between NES and NNES students, faculty, administrators, and teachers, and encouraging their collaboration, might make not only the NNES student more comfortable, but the other staff as well.

Marc's situation may or may not be typical, but close examination of the realities of the teaching and experience of NNES graduate students in studies such as this can add to our understanding of how teachers develop a professional identity, what factors play a significant role, and how these new teachers navigate the "personal journey shaped by context and choice, perspective and values" (Jalongo, xvii). Marc's is also a good example of the situated nature of identity, of how the priorities and understanding of self is influenced by our social identifications and self-categorizations. To this end, social identity theory can certainly make a positive contribution.

6. Further research

This study is obviously limited by this look at the experiences of a single student. But there is clearly an important absence in the literature on the realities facing NNESTs in pre-service contexts like the US MA TESOL program, and this study helps to fill that

gap. More longitudinal research is needed following these new teachers as the deal with the realities of new teaching contexts. It is only through such studies that researchers and teacher educators can begin to recognize the stages and processes in forging a professional teaching identity for NNES MA TESOL students, and the shifting saliency of NNEST social identities as they move in the real world. To best prepare students to teach in real contexts requires an understanding of life in those contexts; more study should be done on the lives of NNES students and the realities they face teaching in authentic teaching situations.

In addition, more research is needed on the importance of social identification and group membership for NNES MA TESOL students before teacher educators and program administrators can gauge the influence they may have in making distinctiveness a positive distinctiveness for such students. For Marc, who continues to work, study, and stay involved professionally, the dynamics of forging a professional identity continue to move her forward in her understanding of herself as a person, a nonnative English speaker, and an English language teaching professional.

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